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Contra aid request goes to Congress

Deter new 'Cuba,' White House says

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WASHINGTON — President Reagan formally asked Congress Tuesday to approve \$100 million in new aid to Nicaraguan rebels, declaring that the funds are needed to prevent the consolidation of another Cuba in the hemisphere and to avoid the use of American troops in Central America.

The request includes \$70 million for military aid and \$30 million for "humanitarian" assistance to be provided over an 18-month period during fiscal years 1986 and 1987. The White House said if Congress agrees, the money will come from a transfer of an already approved Defense Department appropriation and not a new allocation.

Reagan wants the military aid channeled through the Pentagon or the CIA, both banned from aiding the rebels last year when Congress approved \$27 million in only humanitarian aid.

A White House fact sheet summarizing the president's proposal said Reagan was urging Congress to approve the money "based on the need to defend vital U.S. national security interests and to prevent the consolidation of a Soviet-supported Communist state on the mainland of this hemisphere."

A senior administration official, briefing reporters at the White House, said this referred to a desire within the administration to pre-empt a "second Cuba in the hemisphere."

The official noted that Reagan's message to Congress detailing the request said that "If we fail to help friends in need now, then the price we will pay later will be much higher."

The senior official interpreted that to mean that continued funding for the rebels, or so-called contras, is necessary to avoid using U.S. military forces in Nicaragua.

If Congress doesn't approve the request, the official warned, "there are only two alternatives: the introduction of U.S. forces, which the President has rejected ... and the other extreme, walk away from it and allow a consolidation of another Cuba on the mainland."

Reagan, in his message, said that if the Sandinistas agree to a dialogue with the contras, then the United States will resume negotiations with Managua toward a peaceful settlement of the Central American conflict.

The aid request, particularly the military portion, is still expected to face stiff opposition in Congress, although the administration official said legislative sentiment on Nicaragua was swinging in favor of the White House.

"We've had another year of increasing repression of the press, of the church, of opposition political parties," the official said. "We've had further proof of Sandinista subversion. Thus, there is no disagreement between us and Congress about the nature of the Sandinista regime. That's something new and that, we think, is going to affect the final outcome."

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